THE PLIGHT OF A PLAYWRIGHT

By MRS. COULSON KERNAHAN

As Marcus Gilroy ran down the dark staircase he trod on a woman's gown. Obtaining no answer to his profuse expressions of apology he struck a match and found that he was alone.

He continued his course down the dirty, carpetless stairs, past two desolate-looking landings, dimly lit by sickly wall-lamps, and passed out into the November fog.

He was glad it was foggy, for under its kindly shelter he could better dispose of a parcel unobserved. Its destination was the pawnshop. The pawnshop in question nestled affectionately up to a flaring saloon.

Gilroy untied his parcel and disclosed a dressing-case. The pawnbroker took out the articles one by one and examined the hall-marks.

"What do you want for it?" he inquired, with no show of interest.

"Twenty-five dollars," answered Gilroy promptly.

The pawnbroker burst into a harsh laugh. "I will give you ten dollars," he said.

Gilroy took the ten dollars.

A misty rain was falling when he found himself once more in the street. He turned up his coat-collar, buried his hands in his pockets, and strode angrily along the slippery pavement, past the flaring shops, past a third-rate music hall—then into a dismal street and through a covered passage into a still more dismal square which was the young man's present abode.

Gilroy mounted the endless stairs two at a time, not stopping till he gained his own door. Once inside, he lit his lamp and turned eyes of disgust on his wretched apartment. His bed, all unmade, stood in one corner under a window. An oil-stove standing in the fireplace was still ornamented with a frying-pan in which he had prepared his breakfast. The remains of a meal littered a table.

A church clock struck the hour of nine. Gilroy compared his watch, and then hurriedly cleared his table of crockery and eatables—then he opened a bag of MMS. and emptied it on to the table, got his ink, pens, and blotter from the dressing table, and sat down to write, mechanically filling a pipe as he did so. He had scarcely put pen to paper when a curious rasping sound fell on his ear. It seemed to come from the next room. It kept on so long that it irritated him, and he rose and opened his door and peeped out.

A stream of light shot across the passage, and on the opposite wall was the shadow of a slim girl doing something to a door. It suddenly struck him that it might be the girl on whose dress he had trodden, and, he believed, torn it. He was impulsive by nature, so he stepped out into the passage and looked full at the shadow's substance. It was a red-haired girl in a grey, close-fitting gown, and she was trying to do something to the lock with a screwdriver. On another impulse he addressed her.

"Is you lock wrong?" he inquired. "Let me help you."

The girl darted a frightened glance at him; then, seeming satisfied—for Marcus Gilroy had a boyish, frank face—she said. "Thank you—there is something wrong—it won't catch!"

A moment more and the young man was kneeling at the door, examining the lock, while the girl held the candle.

"What a pleasant room you have!" Gilroy said, when he had fixed the lock.

"Yes," said the girl, "but its comfort sometimes makes me wretched. For, oh; there are some terribly poor people in this place. It turns me sick sometimes to look into the rooms opposite. Yet I look when I can't sleep—I see poor wretches creeping up the stairs, to huddle into horrible rooms to pass the night. They come at all hours of the night—little children, too—poor little children! There is a window at every landing, and as the weary wretches creep up, up, a meagre light shines a moment from these windows; and the rooms—there are no blinds—"

The girl ceased suddenly, a conscious blush overspreading her fair, oval face. She remembered that she was talking to a man—and a stranger.

Gilroy found no words—he looked at the pure young face with that impassioned light of sorrow and sympathy upon it and was as one dumb.

Another of his impulses came to him. "You have a typewriter?" he said tentatively.

"Yes, I earn my living by it."

"Will you type a play for me which I have written?"

"Why certainly!"

He was once more at work on the lock.

"Thank you. I will bring it to-morrow. Poor play! I suppose it will be rejected, like all the rest."

"Do you depend on your pen?"

He looked up and laughed bitterly. "I have never earned a penny in my life yet," he said.

"A few months ago I was rich; at a single blow I lost all but a hundred dollars. Then I came here and put up at the Grand, and tried to sell some plays I had written. I used to write plays when I was at college. I could think of nothing else."

Still her eyes questioned.

"Now the money is gone, and no play accepted. There! the lock is right now, so good night."

She held out her hand to him. "Good night, and thank you," she said, and added, "Bring the play to-morrow."

Mr. Tom Wesgate, the actor, was at breakfast in dressing gown and slippers when his cousin Sophie Deland was announced.

"Well, Sophie, how goes the experiment? Hope you fumigated yourself before coming."

"Don't talk rubbish, Tom! I have got a 'find.'"

"A genius among the waifs?" he inquired banteringly.

"No, but a genius all the same; quite a young fellow—a college man. He lost all his money at a stroke, except a hundred dollars, which he proceeded to dissipate at the Grand."

"Oh! dissipated, is he? true hall-mark of genius."

"Nothing of the sort, Tom. He was brought up rich, and I suppose it never occurred to him that he shouldn't go to an expensive hotel. Now he has drifted into the Square; his room is next to mine. He gave me his play to type."

"Then I suppose you want me to look at it?"

Tom Wesgate smiled indulgently. "Well, tell him to send it along; I'll look at it, for the sake of my pretty, eccentric little cousin. What a brute I am! Do have some coffee. No? Well, don't carry your experiment to starvation point."

"I shan't do that, Tom, but my experiences in that awful place have taught me what I wanted to know. Do you know, Marcus Gilroy was in a pawnshop a few nights ago. I was there, as part of my experiment; yet, thinking me poor, he gave me the play to type and would pay in advance. Think of that!"

Marcus Gilroy was in his room. He was meditating whether he should call on the typewriter girl with the excuse of seeing if his play were ready—but really out of an overpowering desire to be in her sweet presence—when there came a knock at his door. He rose and glanced despairingly round his untidy apartment and

"I Have Brought Your Play, Mr. Gilroy."

opened the door. It was the typewriter girl.

"I have brought your play, Mr. Gilroy; and may I come in a moment—I have something I want to say to you?"

Marcus placed a chair for her and closed the door. How homelike the miserable room had become in a moment! The lamp-light made a glory of the frizzy red hair that surrounded the pale, Madonna-like face.

"I hope you won't think it a liberty," began Sophie, with pretty hesitation, "but I know Tom Wesgate—the famous actor, you know. I type for him, and I think your play would suit him. Here is his address."

Gilroy's face lit up—not so much from the fact that there was a suggestion of a possible opening for his play, as because this girl had taken a kindly interest in him.

"It is very good of you, Miss——?"

"Deland," she put in, seeing him hesitating for the name.

"Miss Deland," he went on. "It is a new sensation to be so kindly considered."

The second act of "Captain Cane," was just over, and Marcus Gilroy went to the bar for a drink. He was faint with an unreasonable joy. Some critics were imbibing near him and commenting on his play.

"Best thing for years," said one. "Such dialogue—such situations—such realism! Marcus Gilroy has struck oil."

"How he has managed to employ successful melodrama without sacrificing the true—"

Gilroy fled and paced the cool corridor to calm himself. "She told me she would be here to-night," he said to himself. Then he made his way to Tom Wesgate's dressing-room.

"It's all right, old man—the play will do!" cried Wesgate, clapping him on the shoulders.

"Come along, I want to introduce you to my cousin—there is just time."

Mechanically, as in a dream, Gilroy followed him. Presently he found himself in a box, and before him was the typewriter girl.

She stretched out her hand. Her clear grey eyes had a glad look in them.

In his own were tears.

Invention Worth Money.

"Have you invented anything recently?"

"Yes," answered the sensational scientist. "I have invented a new way to get to the north pole."

"Is it good for anything?"

"Certainly. It is good for ten pages in a magazine."

OUR SEED INDUSTRY

MILLIONS OF FLOWER AND VEGETABLE SEEDS HANDLED.

Southern California Has Been Great Factor in Development of Great and Growing Industry.

Back of the "flowers that bloom in the spring" is the great American seed industry, which supplies the millions of vegetable and flower seeds to the country. At this time of the year they are busy sending out the orders that have already begun to come in for next season's planting.

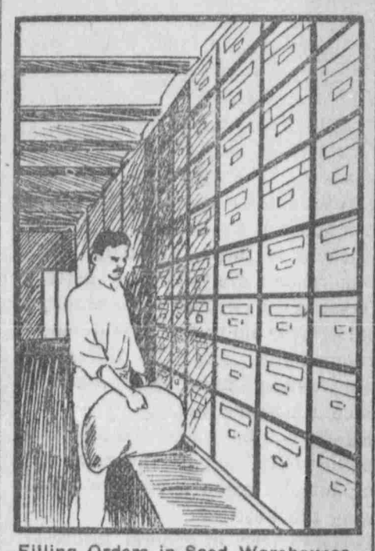
So far as history records, the first sale of seeds in this country was made at Newport, R. I., in 1763 by Nathaniel Bird, a book dealer, who imported a small quantity of onion seed from London. In New York city hemp and flax seed were advertised for sale as early as 1765, and garden seeds in 1776. However, Boston was the chief seed mart of the United States during the early days, and there were in business at the Hub from half a dozen to a dozen dealers who handled seeds exclusively or in conjunction with other commodities. Prior to 1800 practically all the seeds sold in the United States were imported from London.

With the dawn of the new century, however, the seed industry began to assume proportions that justified the raising of the seeds nearer home. From that time forward the city of Philadelphia began to gain recognition as the center of the American seed industry and one of the pioneers in the trade was Bernard McMahon, "seedman and author," who became well known not only in Philadelphia, but throughout the country. During the next quarter of a century rather pretentious seed establishments came into existence in Baltimore, Charleston, S. C., and other cities, and a feature of the trade at that time was a considerable demand for Shakers' seeds. These seeds were not only sold at the regular seed houses, but were also peddled about the country in Shakers' wagons.

How the seed industry has expanded since the practice of selling seeds by mail came into vogue may be appreciated when it is explained that 30 years ago the seed firm that received 100 letters per day was esteemed to be in the flood tide of success, whereas at the present time there are in this country several seed concerns each of which receive more than 6,000 orders per day during the busy season. Speaking broadly, the seed business is divided into three phases—seed growing, seed testing and seed selling—and in each of these occupations thousands of persons are engaged.

Each branch of the industry might be said to be subdivided into two separate activities, the one concerning itself with garden seeds and the other with flower seeds. From a monetary standpoint the product of the growers of garden seed as yet overshadows the flower seed output, but California has given the flower seed industry a tremendous boost.

America has, as a result of the growth of the industry, become vir-



Filling Orders in Seed Warehouses.

tually independent of Europe in the matter of seed supply. Instead of looking to the nations on the other side of the Atlantic for almost her entire supply Miss Columbia's aggressive republic is now not only able to take care of the wants of her own people in the seed line but supplies shortages abroad.

As mentioned above, California has contributed very heavily to the prosperity and development of the American seed industry. Luther Burbank is unquestionably the foremost figure in the seed world to-day. However, whereas the wizard of Santa Rosa includes fruits and vegetables as well as flowers in his ever-lengthening list of novelties, the world at large hears of California most prominently as the great seat of the flower seed industry on this hemisphere. There is nothing more remarkable in the annals of the industry than the growth of the Southern California sweet pea trade. A score of years ago a few acres of these beautiful flowers were grown for seed and not more than a dozen varieties were listed. Now one grower lists 125 varieties. Moreover, so important a factor have the California growers become in the international seed trade, that many eastern and European dealers now make annual pilgrimages to the Pacific coast to inspect the growing crop and hunt for novelties.